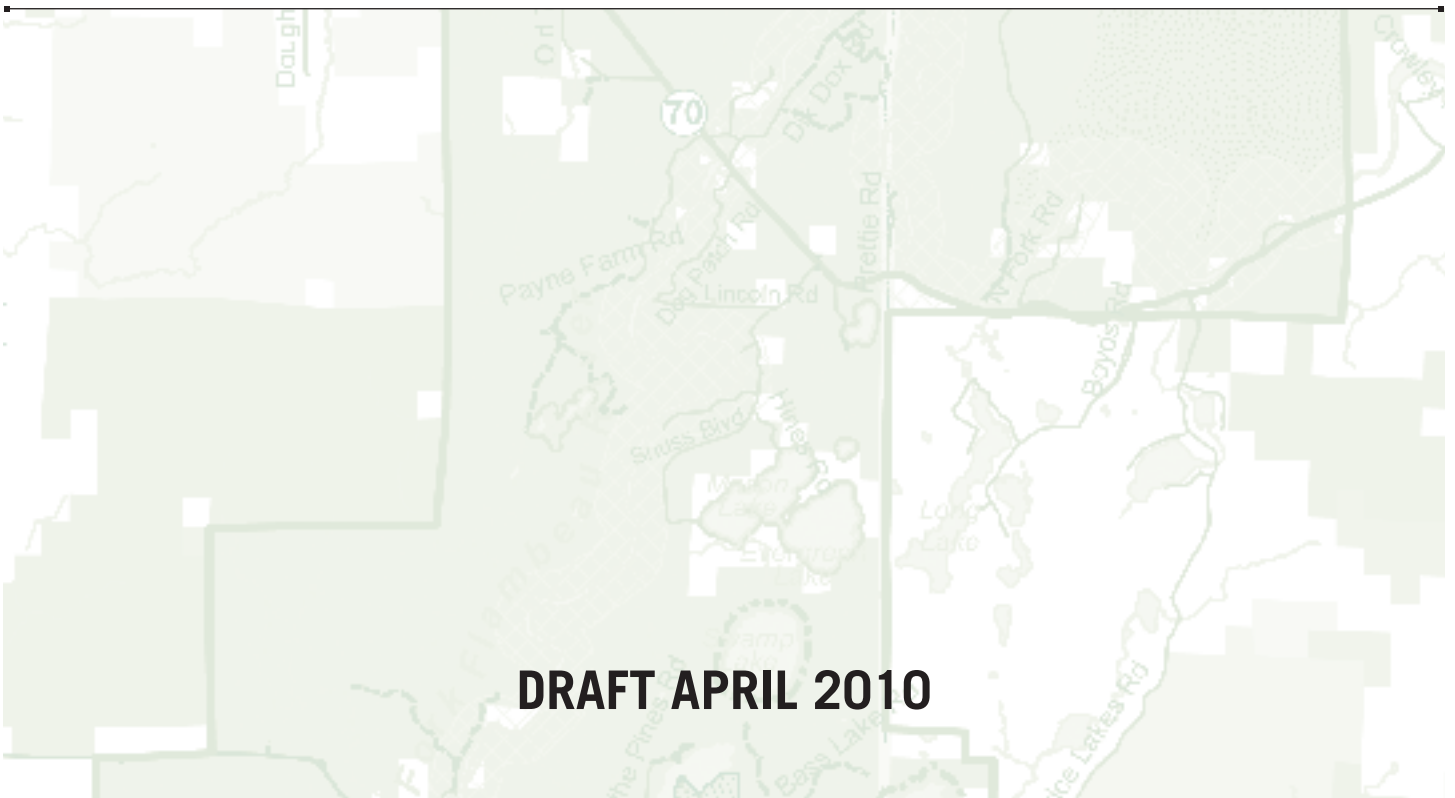




FLAMBEAU RIVER STATE FOREST



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DRAFT APRIL 2010



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This plan has been developed through a team effort by many individuals from the Department of Natural Resources. Through their hard work and expertise, these people have developed a plan that will guide the Flambeau River State Forest into the Future.

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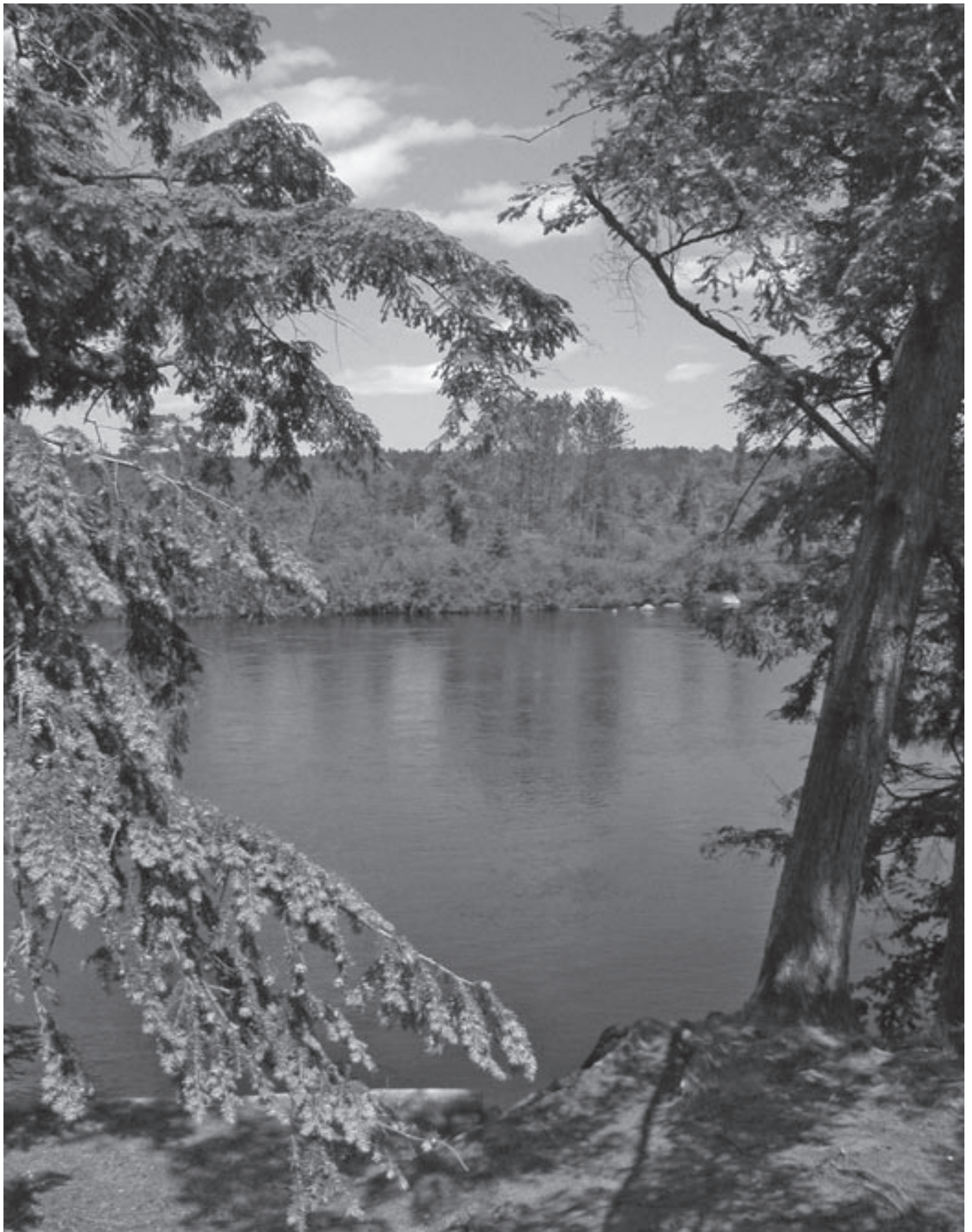
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INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OVERVIEW

Located in north central Wisconsin in the town of Winter, the Flambeau River State Forest is located in Sawyer, Price, Rusk, Ashland, and Iron Counties and surrounds portions of the North and South Forks of the Flambeau River. With just over 90,000-acres, the forest is one of the largest public lands in the region. Extensive forests, wetlands, a high percentage of public lands, including portions of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, county forests, and other state lands are characteristic of this portion of the state. Large tracts of industrial forests are also common in the counties surrounding the forest. The Flambeau River state Forest provides a remote forested experience, with low road densities locally and regionally.

The FRSF supports a diversity of cover and community types, including large acreages of northern hardwoods and remnant stands of old-growth hemlock. Forest production management areas provide for sustainable timber production, while native community management areas and State Natural Areas protect important ecological communities and habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species.

Land management on the forest utilizes a range of sustainable practices, from sustainable forest management to ecological restoration. The Flambeau River State Forest harvests approximately 2,200-acres annually, yielding an average of 22,000 cd. eq./year.

The forest is perhaps best characterized by the 75 miles of the North and South Forks of the Flambeau River that meander through the property. The forest is a popular destination for canoeists and kayakers who come to enjoy the rapids, camping, and remote forested nature of the Flambeau River. Hunting and fishing are also popular recreational activities, with a long tradition of hunting camps for large and small game. The motorized trails for ATVs and snowmobiles on the property connect to large regional trail systems, providing many additional trail miles for recreationists.

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan outlines how the property will be managed, used and developed, and the benefits it will provide. It defines the forest management prac-

tices, recreational uses, other land management activities, and additional aspects of the property's future use and development. The revised plan reflects changing ecological, economic, and social conditions, and current management principles for resource and recreation management in the context of the larger landscape in which the forest is located, as required by Wisconsin State Statute 28.04. The master plan will receive a formal review approximately every 15 years and will be updated by plan amendments and variances as necessary through a formal process that includes public involvement.

Benefits of the Flambeau River State Forest Draft Master Plan:

- Provides a vision and framework for the use, development, management and acquisition of the forest well into the future with an emphasis on the next 15 years.
- Identifies land management areas and plans for their future management.
- Describes general management objectives and specific management prescriptions for each area.
- Makes recommendations for forest production, recreation, and habitat conservation to meet current and future needs.
- Provides for continuing public involvement during plan implementation.

OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

There are several major phases in the master planning process as well as opportunity for public input and participation. These phases include completing the Regional and Property Analysis, establishing the property vision and goals, considering management alternatives, and finally creating a plan and an environmental analysis. The planning process is guided by State Statute 28.04 and Wisconsin Administrative code NR 44.

The development of the Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan has also been guided by a commitment to sustainable forestry. While individual definitions may vary slightly, there is general agreement that sustainable forestry focuses on meeting the ecological, environmental, economic, recreational and social needs of current generations while protecting the

forest's ability to fill the same role for future generations. Additionally, the previous property plan and extensive ecological, economic, and social assessments provided a data foundation for the development of this plan.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public involvement has been an integral part of the planning process, beginning with public open house meetings and surveys to identify important planning issues and views on the forest's future direction. To create a shared vision for the future of the Flambeau River State Forest, the planning process relied on a solid foundation of public participation. In September of 2008, a Public Participation Plan was adopted, outlining the process, procedures, and tools used throughout the planning process to encourage public awareness, interaction, and input. The Department of Natural Resources also worked actively with local towns, tribes, non-governmental organizations, citizens, and businesses to develop the master plan. Public meetings were held in September of 2008, and public comment forms seeking input on a range of resource and recreation management considerations were mailed and available on-line. Additional opportunities for public participation will be provided during the development of the master plan and plan implementation.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

The master plan is presented in three chapters:

Chapter One	Overview of the forest, the purpose of the master plan, and a planning process overview.
Chapter Two	Use and development of the property.
Chapter Three	Background information on the region and the property.

NEED TO REVISE THE FLAMBEAU RIVER STATE FOREST MASTER PLAN

The last master plan for the Flambeau River State Forest was approved in 1980. The Department determined the need to revise the plan in light of changing ecological, economic, and social conditions, to incorporate new information learned since that time and to consider management in context of the larger landscape in which the forest is located as required by Wisconsin State Statute 28.04. This plan will receive a formal, rigorous review approximately every 15 years. When necessary, the plan may also be updated by plan amendments and variances through a formal process that includes public involvement.

SUMMARY OF THE DRAFT PLAN

LAND MANAGEMENT

River Corridor

Approximately 17,000-acres along both sides of the Flambeau River will be designated as a scenic management area. The area retains most of the original quarter mile limited management buffer and includes three areas that were considered for designation as native community management areas.

Cover Type and Forest Production

Over 61,000-acres are managed for forest production, representing 67% of the current FRSF acreage. Overall, there will be no significant changes in forest cover types, but over time, the forest will become more structurally diverse with snags, den trees, coarse woody debris, and large-diameter canopy trees. Approximately 35,000-acres (40%) of the forest is classified as northern hardwoods, which will continue to be the dominant cover type. Forest production levels will increase; approximately 3,000-acres/year (about 3% of the forest land base) with slight annual variations. Forest production management techniques include even-aged management (39%), uneven-aged management (61%) (thinnings are part of even-aged management regime.).

Native Community Management

Approximately 8,000-acres (8%) will be in native community management. These areas include many wetlands and important community types on the forest. Management to develop and retain old growth forests and forests with old growth characteristics will be an integral part in some of these areas, with an emphasis on hemlock-hardwoods, red and white pine, and yellow birch. Of this, 3% will be actively managed and 5% will be passively managed.

Within the native community management areas, there are two existing and six new proposed State Natural Areas totaling just over 3,000-acres. Sites were chosen that contribute to critical habitat for rare species, provide ecological reference areas, or which contain significant geological or archaeological features.

Wildlife Habitat

Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species will continue to be protected by improving and maintaining habitat. Forest management practices will continue to utilize and incorporate considerations for threatened and endangered species. Large and small game populations will also be maintained through forest and habitat management, providing an array of forest types and age classes. A 4,000-acre habitat management area is proposed near the southern end of the property with an

emphasis on early successional species, such as aspen, for ruffed grouse habitat.

Wetlands and Aquatic Resources

Wetlands, forested and non-forested, account for approximately 20% of the forest, will continue to be protected. They provide habitat for a diverse range of plants and wildlife, and are known to harbor many rare species. Wetlands are also critical in maintaining water quality for lakes, rivers, and streams. The diverse array of aquatic resources on the forest includes 75 miles of the North and South Forks of the Flambeau River, many streams, ephemeral ponds, and undeveloped lakes, most within an extensive forest matrix. These important resources will be maintained and protected.

Research

Research on the forest will continue to provide benefits for forest management and ecological values. There are two long-term research projects underway (one by the UW Madison, the other by the Department) studying the use of forest management to accelerate characteristics associated with old growth northern hardwood forests. These areas are represented in an overlay zone; the UW Madison project is an 800-acre project located in Area 14: Flambeau Forks Native Community Management Area and the WDNR project is 500-acres and is located in Area 1: Exeland Plains Hardwoods and Area 5: Jump River Hardwoods. Research zones account for less than 2% of the current FRSF acreage.

RECREATION

Camping

A percentage of campsites at Connors Lake Campground will be upgraded with modern amenities and three new reservable, walk-in-only campsites with lake access will be developed. Lake of the Pines Campground will remain “rustic.” Both locations will receive general site improvements and code upgrades to accommodate a wider range of camping interests. A portion of campsites will be added to the statewide reservation system. A small campground (5-10 campsites) will be developed near the Forest Headquarters to provide a convenient day-trip opportunity and to disperse river users. A new shower building will be provided in a central location on the property to accommodate campers and other recreationists. Special permit camping will continue on the forest. A reservable outdoor group camp will be developed. Four hike-in primitive back pack campsites will be developed.

River Recreation

The Flambeau River corridor will be designated as a scenic management area and continue to provide a remote, “wilderness-like” experience. River campsites and landings will be renovated or redeveloped as needed. Additional camping opportunities will include individual primitive river campsites, small group campsites, and a small rustic campground near the forest headquarters. An ADA accessible cabin will be developed to provide reservable camping opportunities with road or watercraft access.



INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OVERVIEW

Day Use Areas

Day use areas on the forest will be increased. Slough Gundy, a scenic and frequently visited location on the forest, will be developed and improved for day use. Connors Lake Picnic area, a popular day-use location will receive some new amenities. One over-used river camp, Hervas Landing, will be restored and re-designated as a day-use /picnic area. Day use picnic area will be added to site development of the new forest headquarters.

Landings

Most landings will remain unchanged, however, some will be improved to meet users' needs, e.g. handicap accessibility, ramp, fishing pier, boat washing station, or signage. Some landings will be redeveloped to protect shoreline or to improve the approach to water. Several landings will be improved to provide ADA accessibility. Information facilities will be installed to provide maps and details about water related conservation issues or recreational use.

Motorized Recreation

The Flambeau snowmobile/ATV trail will be extended to the south and east forest boundaries providing connections to trail systems in Price and Rusk counties as opportunity allows and sustainability standards are met. Snowmobile/ATV trail facilities will be upgraded to accommodate users' needs and enhance sustainability. An auto tour route is planned to interpret forest resources and management, and educate visitors about public benefits and opportunities.

Non-Motorized Recreation

River recreation – canoeing, kayaking, fishing, camping and sightseeing – will be maintained and enhanced along on the famous Flambeau River canoe trail. A river hiking /backpack trail will be developed to parallel the river and run the length of the forest. Hunter-walking trails in the forest will increase on the forest. Campground nature trails will be rejuvenated. The Oxbo area will be redeveloped to provide non-motorized summer and winter recreational opportunities. A new interpretive trail is planned using an existing trail to the Bass Lake Wilderness area. An accessible trail will be developed at the forest headquarters.

Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping

The state forest will continue to offer abundant opportunities for small and big game hunting and trapping. The diverse landscape of different forest types, lakes and wetlands found on the property will continue to provide important habitats for many game species. Hunter-walking trails will increase. Logging roads and non-designated trails will continue to provide hunting opportunities (see access plan). Non-motorized areas where one can seek a more remote, solitary walk-in hunting experience will remain at approximately current levels.

Access to water resources will be maintained at lakes and river corridors throughout the forest to provide opportunities for water recreation, boating, and fishing. Piers will be developed in some locations to enhance opportunities for shoreline fishing.



Education and Interpretation

A range of educational activities will be initiated to enhance visitor experience and alert them to the benefits and opportunities provided by Flambeau River State Forest. Preserving the history and traditions of the forest through educational activity is a key objective. Educational activities will enhance the forest's recreational niche by encouraging responsible behavior and use of forest resources. Information facilities will be installed or upgraded at key public contact points, landings and trailheads. A self-guided interpretive auto tour is planned.

BOUNDARY EXPANSION

The current project boundary of the state forest is 91,000-acres, with few private in-holdings (approximately 5,000-acres). The proposed boundary expansion will provide the basis for land acquisition from willing sellers. It includes 6 expansion opportunities totaling approximately 49,000-acres. Expansion focuses on protection of water resources and providing contiguous blocks of forested land for a wide range of opportunities, including protection of high conservation value forests and unique habitats and providing public access for recreation. The areas selected will provide greater ecological, economic, and social values for the property and region.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The Environmental Analysis (EA) analyzes the potential impacts of actions recommended in the master plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to forest management and operation. The EA for this plan concludes that the implementation of the master plan provides positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region with minimal adverse impacts.

HOW THE STATUTORY AND OTHER PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF THE STATE FOREST WILL BE REALIZED THROUGH THE PLAN

PURPOSE OF THE STATE FOREST

State forests are defined by Wisconsin Statutes 28. The purposes and benefits of state forests are outlined in the following language of 28.04 (2):

- (a) The Department shall manage the state forests to benefit the present and future generations of residents of this state, recognizing that the state forests contribute to local and statewide economies and to a healthy natural environment. The Department shall assure the practice of sustainable forestry and use it to assure that state forests can provide a full range of benefits for present and future generations. The Department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of

the state forest land and with the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems. These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. The range of benefits provided by the Department in each state forest shall reflect its unique character and position in the regional landscape.

- (b) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that not all benefits under par. (a) can or should be provided in every area of a state forest.
- (c) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that management may consist of both active and passive techniques.

LOCAL AND STATEWIDE ECONOMIES

Under the plan, the forest would increase its contribution to the state and local economies through forest products and tourism. Annual harvest levels will increase slightly in the next years based on current inventory data. Providing a wide range of diverse recreational opportunities and settings, maintaining scenic forest resources, and providing wildlife and fisheries



habitat will ensure the forest's role as a destination in the region.

A HEALTHY NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST COMMUNITIES AND ECOSYSTEMS

Due to the size and variety of resources located on the Flambeau River State Forest, all of the prescribed benefits of a state forest may be realized on the property. By managing for these benefits, the goals of achieving a healthy natural environment and the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems will be realized.

FULL RANGE OF BENEFITS

Protection of Soils and Water Quality

Soils and water quality will continue to be protected by maintaining the majority of the forest in an undeveloped condition. Erosion control practices, such as the Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality, will be followed when conducting forest and other management activities. Expansion of the forest boundary provides opportunities to expand protection to new areas.

Production of Recurring Forest Products

Under the proposed plan, 90% of the potentially productive lands will be under active sustainable management producing forest products.

Outdoor Recreation

The Flambeau River State Forest Master Plan will continue to provide the existing recreational opportunities, while providing many improvements and upgrades throughout the property.

Native Biological Diversity

Native biological diversity will be maintained through enhanced forest structure and species composition in some areas. Aquatic resources and other unique habitats will be protected. Endangered and threatened species will continue to be protected.

Terrestrial Wildlife

The forest and wildlife management prescriptions in this plan have been developed to ensure that habitat and ecosystems for a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife will be sustained and improved.

Aesthetics

Over time, forest health and scenic qualities will be enhanced as longer-lived trees such as northern hardwoods, red and white pine, and yellow birch become more common through forest management. Hemlock will be maintained as much as possible for diversity and scenic qualities. The scenic quality of all shoreline, trails and forest roads will be maintained and enhanced through the application of aesthetic management techniques.

This is your plan. The Flambeau River State Forest master plan addresses people's desires for the future. Wisconsinites want their forest resources sustained for future generations. At the same time, they expect a full range of environmental, social, and ecological benefits today and in the future. This plan attempts to achieve that balance in a scientifically credible and sustainable way. It was developed with countless hours of public input and several rigorous scientific and technical reviews. Many hands were involved in shaping it.

This is a visionary plan. The Flambeau River State Forest master plan captures an idealized view of the state forest's long-term future. This points general direction for short-term actions. The diversity of the forest structure is enhanced over time, providing for a broad range of social and ecological values important to Wisconsin citizens, including recreation. Diverse forest communities contribute to the range of wildlife habitats necessary for all native species, and contribute to broad biodiversity.

This is a focused plan. The plan calls for active and passive management across the landscape and over time to achieve its goals and objectives. It relies on integrated and adaptive management of the forest resources and focuses on the compatibility of forest uses over time.

This is a flexible and adaptive plan. The plan calls for adaptive management and monitoring the response of the forest to strategies outlined in the plan. The responses are evaluated against the objectives. The plan calls for continuous monitoring and regular public reviews and a major review every 15 years.

This is a sustainable plan. A sustainable forest requires flexibility and adaptability. This plan will assure sustainable forest products, continued recreation opportunities as well as a sustainable ecosystem and healthy watersheds.

